

APRIL 2011



VMM-264 Black Knights

FROM COMMANDING OFFICER LTCOL BRIAN G. MCAVOY

SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- From the Incoming Commanding Officer
- From the Outgoing Commanding Officer
- From the Sergeant Major
- Monthly Happenings
- From the Executive Officer
- Promotions
- From the Operations Officer
- From Capt. Stuart ADJ/S-5/DFRO
- Black Knights Photo Gallery

Hello Black Knights, Friends and Families,

The Change of Command has arrived and it was an incredibly proud day for myself and my family. It was a memorable celebration for the Black Knights on a beautiful Afghan morning. SgtMaj Aurelio assembled an exceptionally inspiring Change of Command Program and instructed Capt Ziemba, the Color Guard (led by Sgt Brewster) and the Black Knights in squadron formation on the highlights of ceremonial military parades. Even Maj Turner showed some inspirational "snap and pop" as the commander of troops. He even gave us a motivational "Ooh Rah Devil Dogs!" to round out the ceremony. The only way this day could have been better is if we could have celebrated it all together with our friends, families and fellow Marines back home.

It is hard to believe, but it has been nine months since I joined the Black Knight family. As I told the Marines at the Change of Command, it has been a privilege to be the executive officer and it is even more of an honor to Command such an exceptional squadron, committed to excellence. The Black Knights and their families do it right, day in and day out. My wife and children are ready and anxious to continue our work with each and every member of the Black Knight family, whether it be in Afghanistan or back in North Carolina.

I would like to thank LtCol Hogan for welcoming me into the squadron since the beginning, as one of his own. His leadership, guidance and friendship have pro-

vided me with an opportunity to work with and lead the finest Marines in the Marine Corps. It is not an easy task to transition a squadron from an HMM to a VMM, get it trained, equipped, certified to deploy, and then deploy it to combat, but he did just that. He made it look easy and the squadron's transition was, without a doubt, the smoothest of all the MV-22 transitions to date. The fine work and quiet professional character for which the Black Knights are best known, are a direct reflection of his solid leadership. I would also like to thank his wife. She has been an integral part of the command team, and a sound advisor and friend to both my wife and I. I wish them both the best, fair winds and following seas. I would also like to welcome Maj Steve "Tina" Turner and his wife to the command team. Tina has been the squadron's Maintenance Officer for the past two years and he has now stepped in as the executive officer. They are a valuable addition to the command team and I look forward to working with both of them on a daily basis. SgtMaj Aurelio and his wife have been, and will continue to be, an inspiring source of leadership and guidance for all of us and our families. We are officially half way through the deployment, but we

still have a great deal of work to do. Spirits are high and the Marines continue to perform admirably. Know that the squadron is on the job 24/7 focusing on our mission, but at the same time we have begun the initial planning of our return trip home. Our Family Readiness Officer, Denise, has been working tirelessly as a wonderful resource for our families and I look forward to continuing my work with her as we support the squadron's most valuable asset, our Black Knight families. You continue to provide the support from home that every Marine relies on to complete his or her job with excellence. Please continue to keep the letters and care packages coming as a source of inspiration until the very end. We are so grateful for the support we feel from home every day. Until next time, stay safe and we will do the same over here.

Semper Fidelis,

LtCol Brian "Opie" McAvoy
Commanding Officer, VMM-264



From the Outgoing Commanding Officer - LtCol Jeffrey P. Hogan

Black Knight Friends and Families,

1000, 15 April 2011

This morning I relinquished command of VMM-264 to Lieutenant Colonel Brian McAvoy. It's an emotional thing to pass the squadron colors to a new commander, more so during a combat deployment. What makes it so emotional is that the squadron's success is attributable to the quiet sacrifice of so many people, that one can never hope to accurately or adequately thank them all.

Two years ago this was a CH-46 squadron with a proud legacy and tradition for excellence. As of today, we've carried nearly 10,000 people and half a million pounds of cargo, while flying more than 3,000 flight hours—over 1,000 in combat conditions. Along the way, we've trained and qualified countless aircrew and maintainers without a single mishap or serious on or off-duty injury, as recognized by

our selection for the 2010 Chief of Naval Operations Aviation Safety Award. What these Marines have done is simply inspirational and, as I've written before, none of it would have been possible without your support. To the Marines and families of VMM-264, and on behalf of the Marine Corps and a grateful nation, please accept my humble, profound thank you for your contribution and sacrifice.

It should come as no surprise that, like every other Marine, I can't be effective at work without the love and support of my family. So I'd also like to take this opportunity to express my thanks to my wife for all she's done for the squadron and, in particular, keeping me grounded in reality. I'm absolutely positive that the quiet counsel and perspective she provided me over the years made me a better commander.

As we bid our farewell, we'd like to wish you all the best in the days ahead,

a safe return for the squadron this summer, and some well deserved time off after a job well done. To Brian and his wife, we look forward to the continued success of VMM-264 with you at the helm...best of luck.

Lieutenant Colonel J. P. Hogan, USMC



Crash Fire and Rescue dousing LtCol Hogan after his last flight



VMM-264 Change of Command Ceremony

VMM-264 BLACK KNIGHTS



From the Sergeant Major - Sergeant Major George Aurelio

To our Black Knights Families,

I hope all is well with all of you and that the month of March has long passed. As for us here, the rains have pretty much stopped and the temperatures have been increasing steadily. Since the last newsletter, construction is still ongoing and I am sure the quality of life here will increase exponentially once all this construction is completed. Our Marines and Sailors continue to provide the best support possible with positive results. They work around the clock in order to provide Ready Basic Aircraft for tasking and every passenger we transport saves them from potential injuries caused by IEDs. Our Marines' and Sailors' efforts are making a difference in this critical area; they are dedicated professionals and great Americans doing tremendous things here in Afghanistan. I am extremely proud of and humbled by them each day, and I ask for your continued support and prayers for them.

As we all know, the month of March is

famous for St. Patrick's Day and its festivities. The USO and MWR did a fantastic job of entertaining our troops aboard the camp. They provided several activities to include a 5k fun run, and an ample supply of "near beer". I am convinced that our Marines enjoyed what they had to offer.

Before I go any further, I would like to ask that when you communicate with your loved one, please keep OPSEC in mind. I know that we are anxious and look forward to their safe return and as the date for our return becomes firm, the command will communicate this officially. All other dates that you have heard are merely speculative, and when passed among yourselves causes unnecessary stress. I thank you for your commitment on this issue. I hope that the recent threat of the federal government shutdown shows how well or ill prepared we are from threats such as this. I am sure all of us are conducting a self-evaluation of our preparedness and are taking appropriate steps to improve our standing.

In case you were unaware, on April 15 at 1000, there was a change of command. Our Commanding Officer, LtCol Hogan, relinquished his command to LtCol McAvoy. I ask that you wish LtCol and Mrs. Hogan "Fair Winds and Following Seas" and many thanks to their commitment to our Marines and their families. Their contribution and sacrifice have resulted in many successes both in garrison and while forward deployed. Although they have been with the squadron for several months, please join me in wishing LtCol and Mrs. McAvoy much success on their tour of command. I know they are just as committed to the success of the squadron and our Black Knights families.

Thank you once again for the sacrifices you make for your Marine, Sailor, our Corps, and especially our Country. Until next time, please stay safe.

Semper Fidelis,

Sergeant Major George P. Aurelio



Monthly Happenings

YMM-264

Saturday, 7 May, 10:30 am - 2:00 pm
Black Knights VTC

MCCS

April 13th through May 2nd
Mother's Day Essay Contest
Please call: 449-6711

Friday, 6 May, 5:00 pm
LINKS for Kids

Sunday, 8 May, 9:00 am
Mother's Day Brunch
MCAS New River Landing Zone

Saturday, 14 May, 10:00 am - 2:00 pm
Deployed Family Event
MCAS New River Air Show

Wed and Thurs, 18 and 19 May
Baby Boot Camp

Friday, 20 May, 5:30 pm
While We Wait Club

Wednesday, 25 May, 9:00 am
Family Readiness Assistant Training

Thursday, 26 May, 10:00 am
Preschool Story Time at the Library



Free on-site child care is available for all MCFTB classes with advance registration. For questions on any events or to register, please call 449-5343.

Visit MCAS New River MCCS on the web at: www.mccsnr.com

From the Executive Officer - Major Steve Turner

A word....from the new XO

Greetings Black Knights,

One more month down in the books. This month I find myself writing to you as the Executive Officer. It brings to mind many a "thank you" that I would like to extend. I had the honor of serving as the Maintenance Officer here for the past two years, and I wanted to pause for a moment, to thank the Maintenance Marines of VMM-264. It truly inspired me once I fully understood just how much time, money, and effort goes into making airplanes fly. The main variable in all flying units is a maintenance effort that works around the clock to keep the organization flying. It is truly amazing that in just over 18 months of flying, we went from being a stand up squadron with two airplanes and only six qualified instructors, to a unit supporting combat operations with twelve aircraft, and over twenty aircraft commanders!

They have posted some incredible statistics; 3100 flight hours, transporting over 9,000 personnel and over half a million pounds of cargo in carrying out their assault support mission. The bottom line is that none of those accomplishments come easy. They come at the expense of MANY Marines working long, hard hours on the flightline and in the S-Shops. Time that could just as easily be spent on recreation or with family....but the work of multiple people, who sacrifice on behalf of the command, is what makes this machine "go". I've never been more proud than to serve alongside this Maintenance crew. Not only did they accomplish a lot, but they did it the right way. Zero mishaps or flight related injuries as the result of doing business the right way, the first time. Thank you for your efforts Black Knights; you will continue to set the bar high for future units to compare themselves by.

Keep providing the morale support from home....we're probably over half way

there, but notice the word "probably"!

In this business nothing is a guarantee, and in lieu of a return date, please do not start rumors by stating when the unit is coming home. Believe me, we don't know the exact date yet. Things change in the world, which define military requirements. We are not exempt from that facet of military life. I know it can cause angst, but please be assured that once we know, you will be the first to know. Have a Happy Easter and Spring Break, and find time to cheer on, or participate with, the Black Knights kickball team, the "CheckMates"!

S/F,

Maj Steve Turner



Promotions and Awards - Congratulations!

PROMOTIONS

LCPL CINDY PLASCENCIA
CPL MALCOM BROWN
SSGT JULIAN CEBALLOS

COMBAT AIRCREW WINGS

SSgt Batchler	Cpl Helms
Sgt Barfield-Smith	Cpl Jones
Sgt Meccico	Cpl Reed
Sgt Neseth	Cpl Saludes
Sgt Walkerstill	Cpl Winslow
Sgt Whatley	LCpl Constant
Cpl Alder	LCpl Cox
Cpl Baker	LCpl Farist
Cpl Cederholm	



Black Knights who were awarded Combat Aircrew Wings

From the Operations Officer - Major Brian Koch

Greetings Family and Friends,

Your Marines and Sailors continue to provide invaluable service to their country for which you should take pride. To date, we have moved almost 9,000 people and 220 tons of cargo. The value of those numbers comes in the number of Marines and coalition partners that we are able to keep off the roads and avoid exposure to IEDs encountered during overland movement. A twenty minute flight in a V-22 saves a convoy drive of over 6 hours. A forty-five

minute flight can save a convoy movement requiring several days.

As we approach the midpoint of our deployment, our thoughts are beginning to turn towards our return. While we still have a significant portion of our mission remaining, as details on our return dates and post deployment leave blocks are solidified, we will ensure that information is disseminated to the Marines and home front in a timely manner.

Even though we just experienced a rare overnight thunderstorm, we are

seeing the weather turn from the wet, sloppy, and somewhat cold conditions we experienced during our first several months to the hot, dry baking oven we expected. With that, please update your care packages from hand warmers and thermal socks to sunscreen and lip balm; homemade cookies never go to waste either. Thank you for your continued support,

Maj Brian Koch



Captains Staiton, Semler, Ramirez and 1stLt Nin enjoy an afternoon smoke



Avionics Shop



Marines enjoy a BBQ with some near beer



Cpl San Miguel takes a photo with the crew flying his flag

“The True Backbone of Squadron Flight Operations” - Written by Captain Kyle Stuart

Mission assigned, planning complete, flight crew briefed and take-off time rapidly approaching. Forty-Five minutes prior to launch I walk over to the hangar and into Maintenance Control to get my aircraft assignment brief. Each of the aircraft has revealed their own unique persona over time. Maintenance Control develops a love/hate relationship (more love or hate depending on the aircraft). Maintenance watches over its Ospreys like a parent over its child and Master Sergeant Glantz hands over the 'keys' to the bird as reluctantly as a father might the keys to his classic Ford Shelby GT to his sixteen year old son. While my official call-sign is “Zoolander,” Control has taken a liking to nicknaming me “Princess” or “Boy Toy” on the aircraft assignment board. I take pleasure in maintaining the never dying ribbing that takes place between maintenance and the pilot corps. After I successfully pry the keys from Master Sergeant's hand, I head over to Flight Equipment where all the necessary gear I will need to accomplish the mission is laid out ready to be donned like a knight's armor. Helmet, flak vest, night vision goggles, oxygen mask, and survival kit are all kept organized and readily available as required. As I walk out onto the flight line I know exactly which aircraft is 'mine' by looking for the flashing lights signaling start-up. One crew chief is out front monitoring the aircraft and the other is in the co-pilot seat running all the pre-flight tests. Once the aircraft is down to engine start I climb into the seat and I strap myself in before beginning my own pre-start routine. It's at this point that I reflect on all the maintenance man hours that have gone into getting this aircraft primed, preened, and ready for this mission long before the mission was ever assigned.

While flight operations run for as much as twenty

hours a day, the maintenance day is a non-stop evolution. Despite being with the “Black Knights” for a year now, there are still Marines in the Maintenance department that I don't readily recognize. This is because by the time I have walked to an aircraft, which a Marine may have spent 12 hours working on, they have moved on to another aircraft to get it ready for the next day's mission. It may have been 3 hours since the aircraft flew last or it may have spent the last week in the hands of the Phase Crew going through meticulous inspections. I can rest assured that I am at the controls of a flight-ready aircraft due to the high standards maintained by the Quality Assurance department before the aircraft is slated for a mission.

With the Aircraft Commander to my right, I run through some last minute checklist items and as I place my hand on the Engine Control Lever, the crew chief gives the visual signal for the engine start. Surrounding the aircraft are Marines: ‘Troubleshooters’ from each of the different Maintenance shops. Avionics is at the ready if one of the electrical sensors is not functioning. Airframes is standing by if a panel needs to be replaced or if fluid levels are low. Each Marine awaits the engine start with their fingers crossed that the aircraft will decide to behave itself and that their sweat was not in vain. We all know that even with the best of efforts not every aircraft will start-up without a hitch. I know that even if I cannot take this aircraft today, there is another aircraft across the line down to engine start, ready to back us up.

With a healthy bird and fully equipped with defensive measures from Ordnance, the crew chiefs strap down the cargo, fuel up the aircraft, load the passengers, and we launch off into the skies

of Afghanistan to accomplish that day's mission. There is no time for the Maintainers to revel in their accomplishment. There are several other aircraft possibly awaiting attention and there is no telling what gripes will arise during our flight. After completion of the mission we return to base. If all goes well we can shut down the aircraft and put it to bed. Even then the crew chiefs have to perform a four hour inspection before their day is done. As a pilot I never want to walk into Maintenance Control after a flight and report a discrepancy because I know it only means an addition to an ever growing laundry list of maintenance duties. My hat goes off to all the Marines in maintenance; all the way from Marines who turn the wrenches, inspect the aircraft and run the paperwork; to the Marines I fly with. I know with confidence every Marine gives their full effort, day in and day out, not for me, but for the mission and the Marines out here in Afghanistan who depend on us to get where they need to go and the supplies they need to win the War.

-Capt Stuart



Smiling for the camera at Operation Baby Shower



Cpl Baker Escorting the Secretary of Defense



Operation Baby Shower was an event hosted for forty military spouses who are expectant mothers. The First Lady and Dr. Biden brought White House onesies and an assortment of gifts collected through an Operation Shower gift drive held at the White House.

Marine Corps Osprey squadron welcomes new leader in Afghanistan

Story by Cpl. Samantha H. Arrington

CAMP BASTION, Afghanistan - A Marine Corps MV-22B Osprey squadron deployed with 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing (Forward) welcomed a new commander at Camp Bastion, Afghanistan, April 15.

The Marines and sailors of Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 264 said goodbye to Lt. Col. Jeffrey P. Hogan who relinquished command of the squadron to Lt. Col. Brian G. McAvoy during a ceremony at the squadron's hangar. "It is hard to leave Marines I've worked with," said Hogan, a graduate of Northeastern University in Boston, Mass. "Especially while on deployment out here."

The ceremony marked an end to nearly two years in which Hogan has served as the squadron's commanding officer. The squadron has flown more than 1,200 combat hours and transported more than a half million pounds of supplies in Afghanistan under Hogan's command. The former commander will next travel to the Naval War College in Newport, R.I., to continue his military education.

"I am very proud of the Marines," said Hogan. "They have worked hard and done great things."

McAvoy, the squadron's new commanding officer, served previously as its executive officer. McAvoy said at the ceremony that he was prepared to lead the squadron to continued success throughout their deployment and into the future.

"I plan to build upon what Lt. Col. Hogan has already accomplished, he has done an excellent job," said McAvoy, a native of Lowville, N.Y. "My biggest priority is bringing every one of these Marines home safely."

LtCol Hogan passes off the Squadron Battle Colors to LtCol McAvoy





Flightline Marines Sharing a Care Package from Home

Maintenance Marines Working on the Mid-Wing Gearbox

“In Their Boots” - Black Knights Style

Showing some MCMAP Skills



Black Knights Representing on the Flightline



Demonstrating Rescue Techniques



Black Knights Dominating over VMM-266 in the Tug of War